

# Chapter One - Winter

Why am I still in this bathroom? I finished my shower twenty minutes ago. Something is telling me that this is the day. So, I went into my stash of Clear Blues under the counter. I need to see one word in the tiny little window. Pregnant.

Tyson and I have been trying to have a child for the last three years. Three years almost to the day. This last month has been special. Tyson just signed a big liquor contract and our anniversary was just a couple of weeks ago. We went to Belize, and all my tests indicated I was ovulating. I didn't tell Tyson though. I just wanted to make love to my husband on our anniversary without the idea of procreation looming over us as it had for the last twelve months.

"Winter! Will you please hurry up! Sheena is at my house waiting on me and you know she gets an attitude when we're rushing. If she messes up my hair...it's on you."

I had already closed my eyes and started a silent prayer for positive results when my sister reminded me of her presence. Maybe I should have waited until we got back from our event. But it was so tempting to pull out that test. Some months, especially when I'm more than a few days late, I can't hold back. I feel like Pookie sometimes. Those pregnancy tests be callin' me, man. They just be callin' me.

I'm such a pro at these tests that I know there is no reason to wait the recommended two to five minutes. A negative test shows up almost immediately. A positive takes a little longer. In three years, I've had two positive tests. Including this one, twenty-four negative ones.

Tears started to form in my eyes as I dropped the test in the wastebasket. I can't cry. I should be used to this by now. I should be numb. I should have expected those results. But I'll withhold the tears until my period starts. That way Tyson just assumes it's period emotions, not me feeling less than a woman because my body refuses to do what it was designed to do.

I swung open the door to be met by our family's resident brat. Aries Storm, her stage name and her government name. The world placed her on the pedestal where she resides and crowned her Queen Aries. They don't realize that her pedestal was built by me and our parents when Aries was twelve years old.

Aries is a quadruple threat. She sings, dances, acts, and produces music. She excels at everything she puts her mind to, except patience. Patience is a four-letter word to my sister. Our parents chose the right name for her too. Born on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, she embodies her zodiac sign. She claims that I am a true Scorpio.

Aries and Scorpio...Fire and Water...Spring and Winter.

You'd think being so opposite wouldn't make us so compatible. However, the differences are what make us a remarkable team. Aries is my twin flame. She is my person and I am hers. But if it wasn't for the way I've managed her career all these years, she might not be the international superstar that she is.

“Sheena is getting paid for every second of her time,” I reminded Aries as I stepped around her to enter my bedroom. “No one told you to come over here to get me. I have my own glam squad, and my own car and driver. You aren’t the only one with money, sis.”

“I am almost a billionaire,” Aries bragged. “You aren’t a billionaire; your husband is.”

“Oooh, bitch!” I laughed and threw a pillow from the bed at her. “If only your fans knew how shady you are!”

“They know. They don’t care.”

“If you want talk semantics,” I said, moving towards the closet where I keep my casual clothes, clothes I wear around the house and to the gym.

“Oh my God, here you go with that again,” Big Sis rolled her eyes. “I know. I know. What’s his is yours and all that jazz. Stop acting like you don’t have an iron-clad prenup just like me.”

I broke out laughing. Aries will never let me forget the prenup I had the best law firm in Los Angeles draw up for her before she married her neurosurgeon husband.

“My prenup isn’t as iron-clad as you think,” I told her. “It’s less restrictive than yours, that’s for damn sure.”

Aries followed me into the smallest of my three closets and leaned against the doorframe.

“Storm,” she said, using the nickname that my close friends and family call me. “You know good and damn well that prenup was written without any regards to Chris. And I’m still mad at you, Mommy, and Daddy for that. Got my man thinking you think he’s only with me because of my money.”

“Too bad,” I commented. I hopped into a pair of jeans and threw on a HSTRY t-shirt that Nas gave me last year. “A neurosurgeon who makes in year what you make in a week? C’mon sis, what was I supposed to do? We weren’t letting you walk down the aisle without one.”

“And what about you? Why is yours not the same?”

“Because Tyson’s lawyer must have studied law in prison,” I joked. “But I have that infidelity clause in mine, which we didn’t put in yours. Either way, my husband is a billionaire so that makes me a billionaire by default.”

“I’m going to mind my business ‘cause you don’t want to get me started on your husband.”

A very audible sign escaped my mouth before I could catch it. It’s true that I didn’t want to get into a conversation about husbands with my sister. Aries is never going to get over that I married Tyson when I was twenty-one, considering she wanted me to be with someone else. Plus, Aries doesn’t like Tyson. She thinks that a man fifteen years older than me shouldn’t have shown any interest in a twenty-year-old. I know that’s not the only reason she doesn’t like my husband, but it’s the main one. However, with the way I’m feeling after seeing that test, I could not care less what Aries thinks today.

“You know, you can go to this event without me,” I reminded her.

“Why should I though? We’re both being honored because it’s our clothing line. You never want to accept awards with me.”

“Because people don’t care about me,” I told her. “I’m just your manager and business partner. They don’t even see me as your sister anymore.”

Aries wrapped her arm around my shoulder and squeezed. “Fuck them people. They’re giving us a huge honor, and how would that look if we don’t show up? I ain’t goin’ if you don’t go.”

Pushing her arm off of me, I replied, “As your manager, I’m telling you to go to the event.”

“Manager, not mama. Let’s go, sis. Delilah is already at the house with a bunch of dresses she pulled for us. I can’t wait to see them. What you was doin’ in there for so long anyway?”

I frowned at her butchering the English language like that then blurted out, “I took a pregnancy test,” while we walked out of my bedroom. “I couldn’t help it.”

Aries paused on the stairs, her expression a mixture of sympathy, sadness, and impatience. “You are like a crackhead when it comes to those tests. How late are you?”

I didn’t want to say but I did. I also wasn’t surprised when she laughed in my face. Her laugh wasn’t intentionally mean, more condescending than hurtful.

“Two days? Sis, you’re doing it again. All five hundred doctors you’ve been to said not to stress over this. Stress makes conceiving even more difficult. It will happen, Winter. Stop with the pregnancy tests. When we get back, I’m confiscating your stash ‘cause this is ridiculous.”

“I appreciate your confidence and saying that it will happen; you know I do. I just want this so bad.”

“But why?” Aries asked. “We’re not even thirty yet. We have plenty of time to have kids. I remember when you didn’t even want kids.”

“I remember what I said,” I shrugged. “Now I want kids.”

I remembered that time of my life too, but situations and feelings change. They ebb and flow like the tide. I didn’t plan my first pregnancy three years ago. When I realized that I was pregnant, I wasn’t sure how I felt about having a baby. Around that time, life was so hectic for me and Tyson.

My talent management agency had only been open few years and business was booming. I knew that I was going to be a great talent manager when I started following the career of Tina Davis, Chris Brown’s old manager. She was my idol. The whole family knew Aries was going to be a star. I don’t sing or dance, however, I knew if my sister wanted to be the best entertainer in the world, her words, not mine, I would and could help her. We were thirteen at the time.

Aries and I aren’t twins, despite being the same age and having the same parents. I was born to a woman named Tionna McAfee. I don’t know or remember her. The story is that Tionna dropped me off at daycare and never returned. Skylar and Christopher Storm owned the daycare and were already certified foster parents in the state of Ohio. I was given to them on an emergency basis and they decided to keep

me. Eighteen months later, they adopted me. I became Winter Brooke Storm, their second daughter, younger than Aries by five months.

When we were in grade school up until Aries got her first record deal, we used to tell people we were twins. That came to a halt when she got famous and people started digging into our family history. I was fresh out of high school when I became Aries' co-manager along with our mother and father. They handed me full control when I finished college. By then, I already had two more clients and was the youngest talent manager in Los Angeles.

I love being a manager, but it restricts my time tremendously. My time belongs to my clients so I didn't know how I could be a mother and continue to do what I love. Then I heard its tiny heartbeat and everything changed. In sixty seconds, my priorities changed. Three weeks later, I had a miscarriage, and another one five months after that. Now the idea of giving life and being a mother consumes me. Third time has to be a charm, right?

I didn't bother setting the alarm as we left the house. Security and our full staff were still there since it was only four in the afternoon. We approached Aries' Range Rover and I shook my head.

"Question," she said as she opened the back passenger door.

I was about to comment on her leaving her driver sitting in the car for almost forty-five minutes like staff isn't allowed in my house. I stopped myself because I wanted to hear what my sister had to say and not derail the conversation. Aries is easily distracted.

"What?"

"Did you know that your parents moved into my guest house while we were in Dallas? They had a moving truck and everything. I didn't even know they were there until I woke up this morning and Mommy was in my kitchen breaking my espresso machine!"

I laughed at the horrified expression on my sister's face. Aries is funny about people being in her house, especially if she isn't there. She and her husband didn't even live together until a month after they got married. She was hesitant about having anyone in her space. She even asked me if I thought they could have a healthy marriage if he lived in the guest house. Of course I told her no. I can only imagine what having my parents there is doing to her psyche. They may be staying in the guest house, but that won't stop them from coming into the main house at all.

"Well," I chuckled. "Their house isn't finished. I didn't know they were leaving Columbus before it was done."

"I know the house isn't finished so why are they here?" Aries asked. "And why are they building a house in Tarzana? Who lives in Tarzana besides Chris Brown? And I know they don't want to be his neighbor. Why couldn't they build a house in San Francisco or Santa Barbara hours away from me?"

I side-eyed her. “If you think our parents are going to leave Columbus and move to Cali and be more than thirty minutes away from their daughters, you must be high.”

“I’m gonna need to be high for the next three weeks,” Aries laughed. “Shit, maybe I should move to Tarzana and be Chris Brown’s neighbor for three weeks. I’m sure he has good weed.”

“You’re stupid,” I cracked up. “Maybe you should stay in Bel Air and explain the concept of boundaries to your parents. I’ve already done that, which is why they didn’t bring a moving truck and move into my guest house. How’d they get through the gate with a moving truck anyway? Where was your husband?”

“At the hospital,” she replied. “All I know is as soon as they leave to take that ugly ass truck to their house, I’mma have security change the gate code and they won’t be able to get back in. Their house is livable. I checked on it before we went to Dallas.”

“I can’t believe they just snuck into your guest house while you were out of town.”

“I know, right! That’s crazy! How am I supposed to get freaky with my husband with your momma and daddy walking into my house anytime they want? Christopher and Skylar are messing up my newlywed time.”

“You’ve been married over a year. The newlywed stage is over.”

“False,” Aries said with a frown. “With Chris’s crazy hours at the hospital and the way you fill up my schedule with nonsense, we’re going to be five years into our marriage and still be considered newlyweds.”

I raised my eyebrows at my sister, not believing what I just heard.

“I know I didn’t just hear a complaint about your schedule after receiving an email from you with the subject line “I’m bored. Find me something to do” in all caps.”

Ashlynn, one of Aries’ drivers and head of her security, snickered. She knows her boss is crazy. Aries rolled her eyes at the back of Ashlynn’s head and turned to me.

“I meant that day,” she argued. “Not fill up my schedule for the next six months.”

“Then be more specific next time,” I told my client. “I only do what you ask me to do. Plus, I told you I would clear your schedule if you started writing your next album. But that’s not what you wanted to do. So now you work. No days off, remember?”

“I need help,” Aries whined. “You said you’d write with me.”

“Aries, when am I ever going to have time to sit in a studio with you and write songs? You haven’t been my only client in years.”

“But I should be your priority,” my sister continued to whine.

“And you are, but you have other writers. Good ones.”

Aries leaned over and rested her head on my shoulder. “But I like you better. We write hits, sis. You know that.”

Facts being facts doesn’t negate the fact that I have too much on my plate to succumb to my sister’s plea. I repeated my “no” and listened to her whine and complain for the ten minutes it took to get from my house to hers.

Aries house in Bel Air can’t even be called a house. It’s an estate or, as I call it, the Storm-Woods compound. It’s on three acres and way too big for just her and Chris with its eight bedrooms and ten bathrooms. There’s even another mansion on the north side of the property that her best friend built and used to live in before he went to New York. My house, even as big as it is, is still half the size of hers. Aries claims that she’s going to foster kids like our parents did so she’s going to need the space. Can’t wait to see if that ever happens.

The circular driveway already held four cars, letting me know that our glam squads had already arrived. I burst out laughing at the eyesore that was a huge U-Haul moving truck parked to the side of the house near the garage.

“They brought their whole house from Ohio in a U-Haul!” I hollered as we got out of the car. “Why didn’t they hire a moving company? They are so cheap!”

“That’s just ghetto. Twenty-five-million-dollar house with a damn U-Haul parked in the driveway,” Aries grumbled. She rolled her eyes to the sky and repeated our mother’s favorite phrase. “Lord, give me strength.”

There’s a whole salon in Aries’ house with its own side entrance. We went directly there. Even though I don’t have to use my glam team as often as my sister, I’ve been wanting Tyson to approve adding one to our house. He hasn’t even looked at the blueprints I had drawn up. I’m tired of getting my hair and makeup done in the “big closet” as he calls it. I need a salon. Mommy was already sitting in one of the three chairs when Aries and I entered, telling our business to Alexis, Sheena, and Tate as usual.

“And I tell those girls they better slow down before they-”

“Before we what, Mom?” Aries interrupted. “Why you always talking about us?”

“Why are you?” Skylar Storm corrected her twin’s grammar.

I’ve always been infatuated with how beautiful our mother is. She is a hundred percent Native American from the Ottawa tribe in northeastern Ohio. She has the dark copper blemish-free skin representative of her heritage, dark eyes, full lips, and high cheekbones. Her hair started graying early. Now, like many women in her tribe, she wears it long like a silver cloak...so pretty. Aries looks just like her. When we look at pictures of Skylar when she was Aries’ age, the resemblance is uncanny.

“I can talk about you ‘cause I raised you,” Mommy said as she hugged both of us. “Can’t nobody else though.”

I greeted my stylist and makeup artist, Tate, with a hug before asking my mother what we did to warrant her slow down comment.

“Didn’t you two just get back from a gala in Texas less than twelve hours ago? And look at you, back on the move again.”

“It’s the Black Women in Fashion gala, and we are the ones being honored tonight,” Aries replied. “Kinda shouldn’t miss it.”

“And tomorrow?”

“I have a photoshoot for Storm Fit’s fall campaign then another one for Sheena’s hair line, but that’s all.”

“That’s all?” Skylar scoffed. “Your photoshoots are never shorter than six hours and you have two in the same day? And, Winter, I’m not even going to ask you what your schedule is like. Your schedule gives me hives. You two aren’t ever going to fill your big houses with my grandbabies if you don’t slow down.”

“Mother!” Aries shrieked, appalled that our mother would bring up such a sensitive subject in front of company. Aries always overreacts like that.

“Stop it,” I told her. “It’s fine. Tate has been doing my hair and makeup before I even thought about having a baby. We don’t have to walk on eggshells about the subject. Mommy, I took another pregnancy test,” I told her before Aries could snitch.

“Mommy, please tell her to stop it. She’s like a crackhead.”

“Don’t call your sister a crackhead,” Mommy chastised Aries. “C’mere Winter.”

Obediently, I rose from my chair and approached my mom. She immediately pulled my big thirty-year-old behind onto her lap and kissed my cheek.

“My big baby,” she said. “I know how badly you want this. And it will happen. You’re healthy. Every doctor has told you so, baby. You’re timing just isn’t God’s timing. Be comforted by that. God’s got you. You know that. God’s always looking out for you since the day He brought you into our lives. He will always make sure you’re okay. Just trust Him.”

Leaning against my mother’s bosom like I did as a child, I wiped a couple of tears from my eyes. I know what she’s saying is true. I’m not in control here. Every fertility specialist I’ve gone to has said that my eggs are viable and my uterus is healthy. I’m free of lesions or fibroids, and my reproductive system is functioning properly even after two miscarriages. I should trust the medical professionals. I should have faith that everything is part of God’s plan. But something is wrong. I can feel it.